

# PRISM Quartet with Sō Percussion and Partch

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## Color Theory

Music for Saxophones, Percussion, and Harry Partch Instruments  
by Steven Mackey, Ken Ueno, and Stratis Minakakis

We have developed some pretty sophisticated ways of using language to describe music. But music remains such a slippery, elusive thing that we often find ourselves approaching it sideways—through a kind of linguistic sleight of hand. We use the language of the eye to describe this language of the ear: the names of major musical movements were taken

from the visual arts (Classicism, Romanticism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Minimalism). And the metaphor of color has been used, to great effect, to talk about music for centuries, at least. In fact, the ancient classical music traditions of India are built on this metaphor: the word “raga” literally means “color.”

When the PRISM Quartet decided to commission a body of work built around the idea of musical colors, it seemed a natural next step for a group that has already created a substantial and diverse repertoire of music built around the almost infinitely variable sounds of the saxophone family. The sax has a long tradition in classical music, and rock, and even South Indian music; but its most famous players have been jazz musicians—from Coleman Hawkins to Charlie Parker to John Coltrane—whose sound was built around the so-called “blue” notes that are part of the fabric of jazz. So the members of the quartet had a deep connection with the idea of tone colors. But that wasn’t the *Color Theory* moment of genius. No, that came when PRISM decided to ask composers Steven Mackey, Ken Ueno, and Stratis Minakakis to write for the combination of saxophone quartet and percussion. There is no more kaleidoscopic palette in the instrumental world than in the percussion section—where over the years composers have placed such sonic oddities as bird calls, a record player, automobile parts, and the piano.

*Color Theory* pairs PRISM with two percussion-based ensembles: Sō Percussion, the New York-based quartet whose definition of “percussion” is liberal enough to include teacups, twigs, and fuzz; and Partch, the California-based ensemble that plays mid-20th century instruments designed by Harry Partch, whose 42-note-to-the-octave tuning system operates with a completely different sonic palette. —John Schaefer

### PRISM QUARTET

**Timothy McAllister**, soprano saxophone

**Zachary Shemon**, alto saxophone

**Matthew Levy**, tenor saxophone

**Taimur Sullivan**, baritone saxophone

### GUESTS

**Sō Percussion** (tracks 1–8)

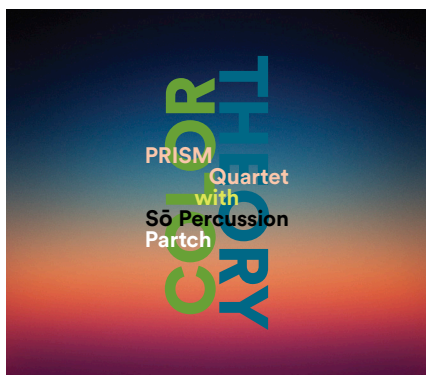
**Partch** (tracks 9–10)

**Derek Johnson**, adapted electric guitar (track 9)

**Stratis Minakakis**, conductor (tracks 9–10)

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## Tracks



### **Blue Notes and Other Clashes** (2016)

Steven Mackey (b. 1956)

PRISM Quartet and Sō Percussion

- 1 **Deep Hymn** 4:24
- 2 **Rustic Ballad** 3:54
- 3 **Off Waltz** 1:58
- 4 **Pale Lament** 3:07
- 5 **Mottled March** 3:23
- 6 **Dappled Grooves** 2:39
- 7 **Dirty Branle** 2:34
- 8 **Prismatic Fantasy** 10:57

### 9 **Future Lilacs** (2016) 22:58

Ken Ueno (b. 1970)

PRISM Quartet, Partch, Derek Johnson, Stratis Minakakis

### 10 **Skiagrafies** (2016) 13:42

Stratis Minakakis (b. 1979)

PRISM Quartet, Partch, Stratis Minakakis

### Traces

**Shadow Memories** (starts at 7:20)

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